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Affordable Housing Shortage Is Targeted

Montgomery Initiative Aimed at Middle Class

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The Montgomery County Council will consider a proposal today to require that 10 percent of homes built in new developments near Metro stations be set aside for middle-class families being priced out of the county's soaring real estate market.

Council member Steven A. Silverman (D-At Large) said the "workforce" housing initiative he is proposing would help people who earn 80 to 120 percent of the area's median income — \$89,000 for a family of four, or \$71,000 for a family of two. That would essentially include families with incomes of about \$50,000 to \$100,000, he said.

Such a program would be geared toward county employees — including teachers, firefighters, police officers and nurses who make too much to qualify for Montgomery's affordable-housing program but not enough to buy a house or condominium at market rate, Silverman said.

"We want to make sure that people who work in Montgomery County have a better shot at living in Montgomery County," he said yesterday at a news conference in Rockville. Council

Bill Targets Shortage Of Affordable Homes

HOUSING, From B1

member Nancy Floreen (D-At Large) said she will co-sponsor the legislation.

Affordable housing, particularly for middle-class families, is expected to be a central issue in the 2006 race for county executive, which Silverman is likely to enter. Silverman has mentioned his housing plan in public settings before.

One of his probable opponents in the Democratic primary, former County Council member Isiah Leggett, has called Silverman's solution inadequate to meet middle-class housing needs. Leggett, instead, backs a more intensive approach: building entire housing developments with the majority of homes set aside for middle-class families.

Virtually all Northern Virginia localities have programs to encourage builders to put up more affordable housing units. Through an effort called Live Where You Work, Arlington

County workers can get \$3,700 loans to help them purchase homes in the county. If the worker stays in the home and in a county job for three years, the loan is forgiven. Dozens of county employees have taken advantage of the program.

In 1998, Alexandria started providing police officers with \$50,000 no-interest, deferred-payment loans if they purchased homes in neighborhoods where extra policing is needed. Prince William is also considering such an arrangement to help county workers afford to live in the county.

Montgomery has an affordable-housing program that requires developers to set aside at least 12.5 percent of new units for families with salaries of up to 70 percent of the median income. But most people who provide county services do not qualify for that program because they earn too much. And most cannot afford the county's market-rate housing: In 2004, the median

sales price was \$666,540 for a new single-family detached house and \$318,985 for a new condominium.

"We're suffering from our success as a great community," Floreen said. "Our real estate prices are out of sight."

About 25 percent of the county's teachers and 75 percent of its firefighters live outside the county, officials said. "We're telling them, in effect, that we're happy to have them work here but go look for housing in Frederick, Pennsylvania or West Virginia," Silverman said. "That's just wrong."

Bonnie Cullison, president of the Montgomery County Education Association, which has 11,000 members, said she supports Silverman's idea. "It's very important for our education professionals to live in the communities in which they work," she said, allowing them to spend more time interacting with students and parents, and less time and energy commuting.

Unlike the county's affordable-housing program, developers would not be allowed to build additional market-rate units in return for offering some at a discount, Silverman said.

They would not lose any market-rate units in order to meet the "workforce housing" requirement, however. For example, a 100-unit condominium building with 87 market-rate units and 13 affordable units would have to have eight additional workforce units to comply with the requirement, for a total of 108 units, he said.

If approved by the council, the Silverman-Floreen bill would help reduce housing prices in neighborhoods surrounding Metro stations, where most of the county's future development is expected. It would be a central part of the county's plan to add up to 6,340 housing units to the area surrounding the Shady Grove Metro station.

The council is expected to vote on that proposal next month.



The bill by council member Steven A. Silverman is to be considered today.